

Saints move from worst to first

Can this really be the New Orleans Saints, the team that once seemed permanently stuck in the bottom of the NFC West standings? Tied for the division lead and battling for a playoff spot with two games to go?

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sports

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Saipan Tribune

Baseball signs more free agents

By RONALD BLUM
AP Sports Writer

Baseball teams returned home from the winter meetings and still kept signing free agents.

Manny Ramirez's \$160 million, eight-year contract with Boston was finalized Wednesday, as was Todd Hundley's \$23.5 million, four-year deal with the Chicago Cubs.

Shortstop Alex Arias agreed to a \$1.3 million, two-year contract with the San Diego Padres; Atlanta agreed to a one-year contract with infielder Rico Brogna and a minor league contract with infielder Kurt Abbott; and Toronto agreed to minor league contracts with seven players, including right-hander Jaime Navarro and outfielder Ryan Thompson.

Texas picked up three more free agents, agreeing to minor league contracts with outfielder Ruben Sierra, left-hander Mike Munoz and right-hander Kevin Foster.

On Monday, the Rangers

agreed to a record \$252 million, 10-year contract with shortstop Alex Rodriguez, causing intense criticism of the Rangers. A day later, Rodriguez criticized the Mets and general manager Steve Phillips.

"All I can say is I wish I could play against Steve Phillips' team and lead 24 guys to beat 'em up," Rodriguez said.

Phillips responded Wednesday:

"I think he doth protest too much for having a \$250 million contract," he said. "We wish him the best."

In Boston, Ramirez appeared at a news conference at Fenway Park.

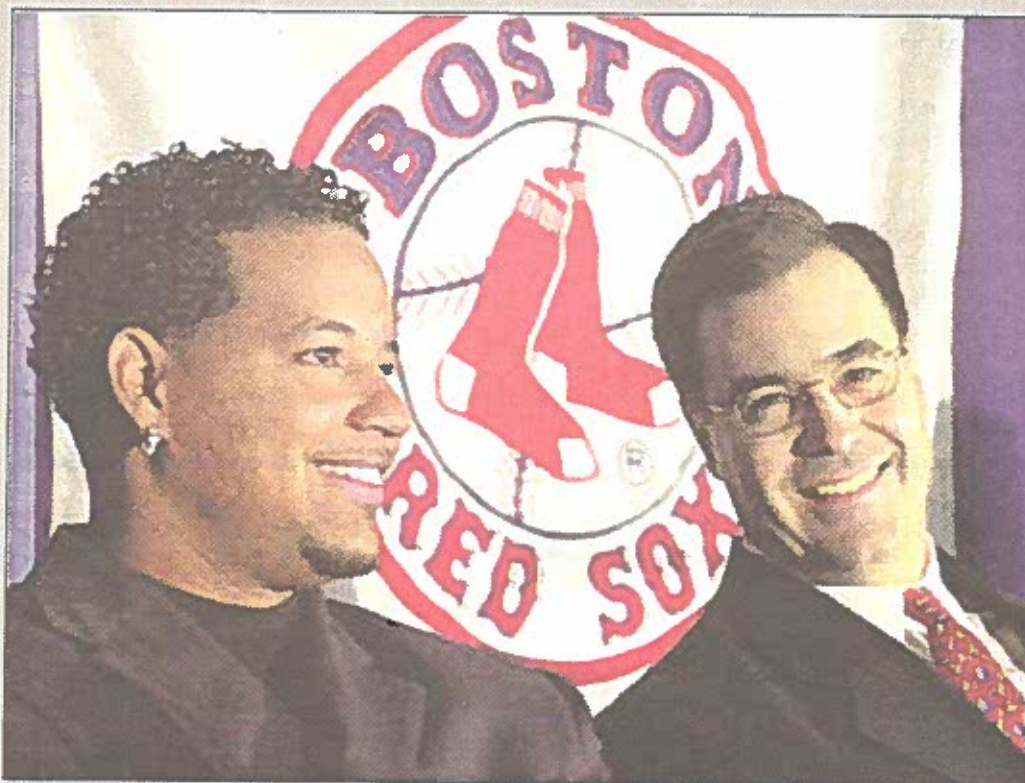
"This kid has been the most gifted hitter in the business," Red Sox general manager Dan Duquette said. "We're a lot stronger than we were."

Ramirez wants to help the Red Sox overtake the New York Yankees, who have won three straight World Series titles

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Red Sox's pursuit of Ramirez pays off

By HOWARD ULMAN
AP Sports Writer



Boston Red Sox general manager Dan Duquette, right, smiles and leans toward newly signed slugger Manny Ramirez during a news conference to introduce him at Fenway Park in Boston on Wednesday, Dec. 13.

BOSTON (AP) - The phone rang in Dan Duquette's hotel room in Dallas at about 2 a.m. Monday, waking Boston's general manager who had hit the pillow thinking he had lost his pursuit of Manny Ramirez.

It was Jeff Moorad, the slugger's agent, wanting to clarify salary figures in the Red Sox offer.

"He said, 'Hello?,'" Moorad recalled Wednesday, "one of those classic, 'No, no, don't worry. I'm awake,' and you know he's sound asleep."

They spoke for about 10 minutes, but when Duquette awoke Monday morning he still wasn't sure he would land the man he hoped would bat cleanup for Boston.

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2000 Aces of the Month

January	John Guerrero
February	Oliver Sasaki
March	Dan Mettao
April	Serafin Pablo
May	Joe Mettao
June	Tony Satur
July	Bill Limes
August	Gus Camacho
September	Joe Lizama
October	Ben Duenas
November	Kim Seung
December	Jess Wabol

RGA Club Champion

RGA would like to inform all monthly ace winners that the tournament for club championship has been scheduled for Dec. 16 at Coral Ocean Point Golf Resort and tee time is set for 7:00 a.m.

Reservation is good for 24 pax. Also after the tournament, RGA is inviting all participants to proceed to Kaina Sa Isla for the presentation of awards and luncheon.

For more details contact Jess Wabol at 234-6167 (work) or 235-1794 (home).

Davis Cup captain: Patrick McEnroe

By BOB GREENE
AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) - Patrick McEnroe hopes to succeed where his older brother failed.

McEnroe was introduced Wednesday as the 38th captain of the U.S. Davis Cup team, replacing John, who quit after only 14 months on the job and a 5-0 loss to Spain in the semi-finals.

Unlike John McEnroe, who tried to build his team around Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi, Patrick wants "to create a team spirit among all the players."

Neatly sidestepping questions about Sampras, Agassi and even his brother playing on the team, Patrick kept returning to his themes of team effort and new faces.

"We need someone that's

going to bring along some of the young players of the future of U.S. tennis," he said. "I think there are some real bright hopes. It is a time to have some of the old and, hopefully, bring in some of the new in the incoming years."

McEnroe said that not being the player his brother was may be to his advantage in his role

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PGA Tour boosts prize money in 2001

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) 0 Prize money on the PGA Tour will go up to a record \$180 million in 2001, with an even larger increase anticipated when the tour negotiates a new four-year television contract in the spring. Just as importantly, commissioner Tim Finchem said

Wednesday he's confident the tour can work out marketing issues with the player largely responsible for those rising purses- Tiger Woods.

"We don't have issues that can't be resolved," Finchem said during a teleconference

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Woods renews American Express deal

NEW YORK (AP) - Tiger Woods renewed his endorsement contract with American Express on Tuesday, making him a global spokesman for the company until mid-2007.

Financial terms were not disclosed. Woods, 24, originally signed with American Express in 1997, the year he became the youngest Masters champion with a record-break-

ing performance and was voted PGA Tour player of the year.

Golf World magazine reported the original deal to be worth \$26 million over five years.

In September, Woods renegotiated his contract with Nike that will pay him at least \$100 million over five years starting in 2001. That brings his endorsements with 12 companies to about \$54 million a year.



Woods



2000 CENTURY INSURANCE CHESS TEAM TOURNAMENT

American Memorial Park, December 10, 2000

6th Round Results

CHARGUALAF & ASSOC.	BYE	YPD	CTSI	CMS	PS	YLO	JHLO	TOTAL
TOTAL		1.5	2	2.5	2	1		9
PERFECT SETTING	CMS	BYE	YLO	JHLO	CA	YPD	CTSI	TOTAL
TOTAL	2		2.5	2	1			7.5
YUICHIRO'S PRTG. DESIGN	JHLO	CA	BYE	CTSI	CMS	PS	YLO	TOTAL
TOTAL	1	1.5		1.5	2	0		6
YANA LAW OFFICE	CTSI	CMS	PS	BYE	JHLO	CA	YPD	TOTAL
TOTAL	2	1	0.5		1	1		5.5
CTSI LOGISTICS	YLO	JHLO	CA	YPD	BYE	CMS	PS	TOTAL
TOTAL	1	0	1	0.5		1		3.5
JOE HILL LAW OFFICE	YPD	CTSI	CMS	PS	YLO	BYE	CA	TOTAL
TOTAL	2	3	1.5	0	1			7.5
CONST. MAT'L/SUPPLY	PS	YLO	JHLO	CA	YPD	CTSI	BYE	TOTAL
TOTAL	1.5	2	1.5	1.5	1	1		8.5

*Unplayed Game

ORGANIZED BY: CNMI CHESS ASSOCIATION (US Chess Federation member)

49ers' GM: Rice may not come back

SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP) - Bill Walsh and Jerry Rice agree that the game's most prolific receiver likely won't finish his career with the San Francisco 49ers.

Confirming what's been widely known for months, Walsh said Wednesday that Rice probably will play the final home game of his 16-year San Francisco career on Sunday against Chicago.

"The greatest player in our era of football will no longer wear a 49er uniform, in all likelihood," the general manager said. "I'm hoping everyone (at 3Com Park on Sunday) acknowledges it on their feet, chanting, 'Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!'"

Walsh said Rice, scheduled to make \$4.2 million next season in a contract that runs until 2004, likely will be released after June 1 because of the 49ers' salary cap woes and the pressure from San Francisco's young corps of receivers.

After failing in weeks of negotiations to possibly restructure Rice's contract, Walsh said he will give Rice's agent, Jim Steiner, permission to speak to other teams.

Rice, who isn't ready to retire, said he doesn't think he'll play beyond the 2001 season. Rice, who will turn 39 next year, said he doesn't want to be in uniform at 40.

"I still enjoy the excitement of the game, and I still have that fire," Rice said. "I'm at peace with whatever happens. When it happens, it will be devastating. It will be a shock, but I've seen guys like Joe Montana and Ronnie Lott and Steve Young go through it. I know how to deal with it."

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and 26 in all since Boston last won in 1918.

"I'm just tired to see New York always win," he said.

In Cleveland, Indians general manager John Hart was ready to move on.

"He's the enemy now," Hart said.

Cleveland offered \$136 million to retain Ramirez, its best hitter.

"It came down to the Boston structure was significantly different than ours," Hart said. "We had a signing bonus, but they had a bigger signing bonus and so much more was paid into the first three or four years of the deal, where ours was backloaded to fit our payroll structure. This wasn't like we were low-balling him or anything."

Saints move from worst to first

By MARY FOSTER AP Sports Writer

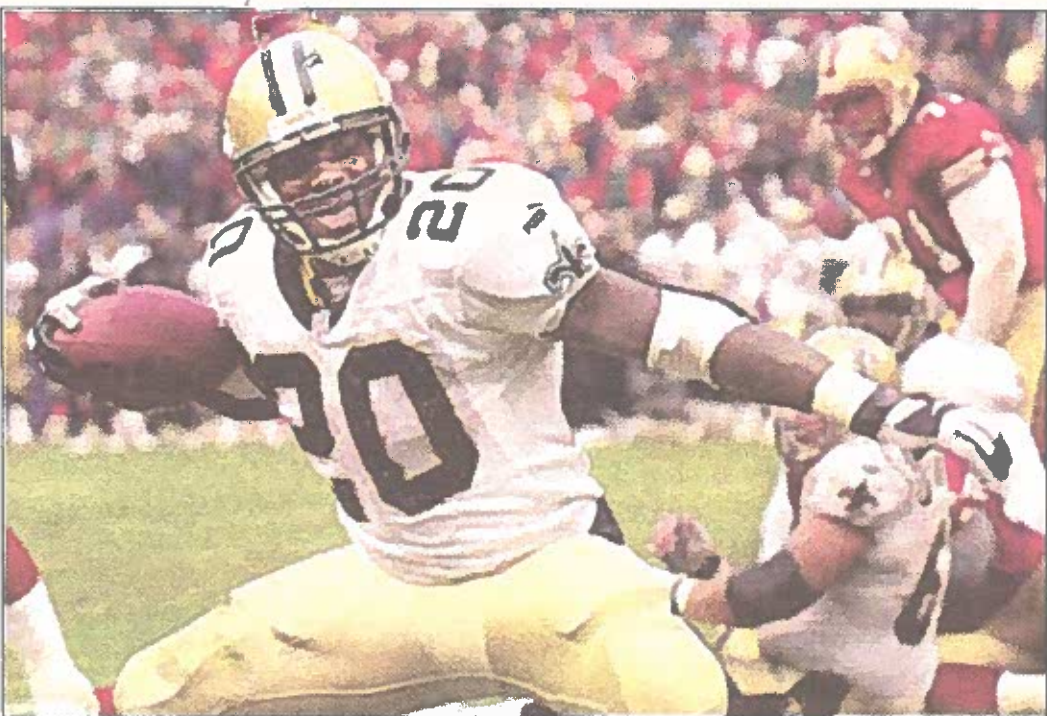


NEW ORLEANS (AP) - Can this really be the New Orleans Saints, the team that

once seemed permanently stuck in the bottom of the NFC West standings? Tied for the division lead and battling for a playoff spot with two games to go?

The 9-5 Saints, already six-games better than last year's 3-13 record, have a shot at jumping from worst to first, mirroring what the St. Louis Rams did last year and the Carolina Panthers did in 1996. And that's even with injuries to the two offensive players who carried them most of the year - quarterback Jeff Blake and running back Ricky Williams.

"I know a lot of people that have followed the Saints over the years find it kind of unbelievable," said Randy Mueller,



New Orleans Saints running back Terry Allen celebrates after scoring from the 1-yard line late in the fourth quarter to beat the San Francisco 49ers 31-27 on Sunday, Dec. 10 in San Francisco.

who took over as general manager a year ago. "But for those of us who just got here, it's just a lot of fun."

When Mueller and coach Jim Haslett took over the Saints last January, the team's last winning season was seven years in the past. But the team was not just

short of victories. New Orleans also was short of draft picks, talent and morale.

"I think last year was the low point in my career," offensive

tackle William Roaf said. "I had begun to feel like I'd never see a winning season here. I was at the point I just wanted out."

When New Orleans opened the season 1-3, it looked like more of the same. It was, after all, supposed to be a rebuilding year.

But the Saints won their next six, five on the road, and suddenly found themselves on the verge of an astounding turnaround.

With two games left, New Orleans is the most improved team in the NFL, record wise, edging out the Philadelphia Eagles' five game improvement from 5-11 last year to 10-5 this season.

"We said when we first got the job here that you have to build through stages," Haslett said. "One was learning how to win games, then how to manage a football team and then, once you had success, how to handle success. We've kind of grown that way all along."

UCLA greets honor Coach Wooden

By HAL BOCK AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) - They came to him as teen-agers, undisciplined kids who could run, jump and shoot. They left as adults, equipped with the tools they would need for life.

John Wooden explained the intricacies of basketball and life to each of them and, while he was at it, established one of the great dynasties in sports.

His UCLA teams won 10 NCAA championships in 12 years, a stretch of success unlikely to be repeated. There

were four undefeated seasons and 88 straight victories. Twenty-five years after he coached his last game, his old players still worship the man they call "Coach."

Sports Illustrated presented Wooden with its Legacy Award this week as part of its Sportsman of the Year show that will be aired by CBS on Thursday night. Many of his ex-players flew to New York for the event.

No one speaks more eloquently about Wooden than Bill Walton, who played for UCLA at a troubled time in America, a time of Vietnam and

Watergate, a time when young people were asking hard questions, when dissent was in style.

For Wooden, the answers never changed.

"We thought he was nuts," Walton said. "But in all his preachings and teachings, everything he told us turned out to be true."

Walton remembered the coach had his own way of handling the occasional rebels who showed up to play basketball for him and would not abandon their own agendas.

"He would say, 'I admire and respect your position,'" Walton

said. "We'll miss you here at UCLA. We've enjoyed your time. Thanks for coming."

And that was that.

Wooden gave his players rules for life.

"I don't go with the general sense of winning is just to score," Wooden said Wednesday on CBS's Early Show. "I don't think a man's successful just because he happens to accumulate a lot of material possessions or a position of power and prestige. I think there are other things and I think it's the other things that bring about the winning that are more important."

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"After Jeff called," Duquette said, "he went back to negotiating with the Indians."

Moorad and Ramirez also were uncertain to the point that Moorad called his office Monday afternoon to make plane reservations to both Boston and Cleveland from the site of

baseball's winter meetings in Dallas.

"We literally did not know which direction this was going to turn until the very end," Moorad said.

At about 5:45 p.m., CST Monday, Ramirez decided on Boston, which offered a better financial deal. But not before Moorad squirmed for about three hours, anxious to see if

Duquette - eager to add Ramirez's bat to a weak offense - would agree to two more conditions.

"He's painstakingly deliberate at times," Moorad said, "but, let me tell you, he knew the timing on this deal."

Duquette finally agreed to the conditions, although neither he nor Moorad would say what they were, and the two

sides had an eight-year, \$160 million deal with two option years that could take it to \$200 million.

Ramirez signed it Wednesday when he held a news conference at Fenway Park.

"It was hard a short time back to envision Manny doing anything but standing at a press conference in Cleveland," Moorad said.

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to discuss the state of the tour. "His business strategy is not inconsistent with ours. We'll work very closely together. That's very much in the interest of the tour."

Last month, Woods criticized the tour over the marketing rights to his image and Internet issues. He and Finchem met two weeks ago in Los Angeles, a meeting which both described as a positive without discussing details. Finchem again declined to

discuss specifics Wednesday, instead focusing on one of the most memorable years in golf and what can be expected in the years to come.

One possibility? The Players Championship moving from March to May in 2003.

The only significant change for 2001 is the prize money, roughly a 10 percent increase in which nearly 20 official events could have at least a \$4 million purse. Finchem also hinted that the World Golf Championships could increase their purses from \$5 million. Woods earned just over \$9.1

million in an amazing year - nine victories, completing the career Grand Slam and the first player since Ben Hogan in 1953 to win three straight majors. He won more money than Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus combined in their careers.

A record 15 players made over \$2 million, and 45 players earned at least \$1 million.

But in light of shortstop Alex Rodriguez signing a 10-year, \$252 million deal with the Texas Rangers and other baseball signings this week, Finchem said, "We still have an awfully long way to go."

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as captain.

"A very big part of the job is understanding strategy, understanding the players, understanding what the strengths and weaknesses are," he said. "I think I have that because as a player I didn't have all the talent in the world, but I did as well as I did with figuring out how to get the most out of my ability, figuring out how to win matches that probably I had no business winning."

Hornets 101, Kings 90



CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) - Jamal Mashburn scored a season-high 33 points and Baron Davis added a career-high 26 to lead the Charlotte

Hornets to their first victory over Sacramento in over three years, 101-90 on Wednesday night.

The Hornets had dropped four straight to the Kings since a 121-102 victory on Dec. 2, 1997.

Pacific Division-leading Sacramento lost consecutive games for the first time this season. The Kings lost to Atlanta, 107-99, on Tuesday night.

The Kings were without forward Peja Stojakovic, who missed his fourth straight game with a bruised right shoulder.

Sacramento looked tired early and never led in the game, shooting just 7-for-22 from 3-point range. The Kings committed 16 turnovers.

Chris Webber scored 25 points and Doug Christie added 17 for Sacramento, which shot 37 percent through the first three quarters.

Charlotte shot 50 percent through the first three quarters and built an 83-64 lead.

The Hornets, leading 74-64 with 1:40 left in the third, broke the game open with a 9-0 run. Hersey Hawkins made a layup, and, after a Vlade Divac turnover, hit a 3-pointer.